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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TUNIS 002144

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG (MHARRIS), NEA/PPD (AFERNANDEZ)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: TUNISIANS PROUD OF "ISRAELI DEFEAT", BUT MANY
WORRY WAR MAY STRENGTHEN EXTREMISTS

REF: A. TUNIS 2111

[1](#)B. TUNIS 2484

Classified By: CDA David Ballard for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: With the passage of UNSCR 1701 and the cessation of hostilities in Lebanon and Israel, the tense mood amongst many Tunisians, palpable during the active fighting, has largely abated. Tunisian newspapers proclaimed victory for Hizballah, and editorials spoke of the hope "the Hizballah victory" gave to all Arabs and Muslims. The GOT officially welcomed UNSCR 1701 and President Ben Ali called for an emergency Arab League Summit on Lebanon and Palestine.

Post once again received a protest delegation of civil society leaders, some of whom later traveled to Beirut to participate in a march to be held in the Lebanese capital on August 19. Many contacts emphasized that Hizballah had gained politically from the recent war, and that this may strengthen Islamist and extremist groups throughout the region. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The following are this week's reactions from the GOT, the press, and civil society groups on the situation in Lebanon.

GOT REACTION

-- The GOT has officially welcomed UNSCR 1701 on Lebanon, releasing a statement expressing its "great satisfaction" with the resolution, which it characterized as a "first step" to the return to peaceful efforts in the search for a negotiated solution. President Ben Ali on August 14 called for an emergency Arab League summit to discuss the violence in the Middle East and to pledge support for reconstruction in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. (Ref A)

-- According to French-daily Le Quotidien, an airplane carrying medicine, blood, and food products was to depart Tunis for Beirut on 17 August. The GOT previously had asked Tunisians to donate blood and money for Lebanese humanitarian aid (Ref B).

-- On August 13, First Lady Leila Ben Ali sponsored the launch of the second annual "Elyssa Sea Route", a group of women skippers sailing in the Mediterranean. Last year the route was from Tunis to Tyre; This year the route changed, replacing Tyre with a number of Mediterranean ports. The event was renamed "the Route of Peace", and dedicated to the Lebanese people.

MEDIA REACTION

-- All Tunisian newspapers continued to publish pronounced anti-Israeli and anti-US articles in coverage of events in the Levant. Following the cessation of hostilities, editorials across the board declared Hizballah victors. Arabic daily Ash-Shourouq, proclaimed the "Hizballah victory honored all Arabs and Muslims" and added that "the era of defeat and humility is gone." An editorial in the Arabic newspaper Akhbar Al Joumhouriya noted that Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah has become the "hero of all the Arab people" and argued that Hizballah defeated not only Israel but "Bush's gang" as well. Most papers carried reports and commentary on New Yorker writer Seymour Hersh's article claiming the U.S. had advance knowledge of and supported the Israeli campaign against Hizballah. Le Quotidien's front-page headline on August 18 claimed: "Bush Helped Israel to Attack Lebanon."

CIVIL SOCIETY

-- A delegation of civil society leaders met with Charge and Pol Section staff August 17 to protest perceived U.S. actions and policies in the Middle East. The delegation consisted of leaders of GOT-authorized associations such as the Tunisian Association for Democratic Women (ATFD), the Tunisian Association of Women for Research and Development (AFTURD), the Tunisian General Worker's Union (UGTT), the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH), and the Tunisian Bar Association.

In an hour-long discussion, the delegation's main points were that a) the actions of the USG and the acute rise of anti-Americanism in the Middle East were empowering Islamists and extremists and endangering the position and potential of moderates and b) the Israeli-Palestinian issue, and the USG's "illegal, indefensible and unlimited" support for Israel, is

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at the root of most regional problems and conflicts.

-- According to Le Quotidien, a delegation of civil society leaders was to travel to Beirut August 17 to participate in a march in the Lebanese capital to be held August 19. Saida Garraj, Secretary General of ATFD, and a member of the delegation that came to the Embassy on August 17, was among those who traveled to Beirut. She said approximately twenty civil society leaders would participate in the trip. On August 16, also according to Le Quotidien, a group of civil society organizations (NFI) met to create a collective of Tunisian NGOs whose mission was to collect humanitarian aid for Lebanon.

-- In an August 16 meeting with PolCounselor, Tunisian, self-described "moderate Islamists", including former An-Nahda leader Zied Douletli and journalist and civil society activist Slaheddine Jouchi, said that the war in Lebanon, and the "U.S. role of supporting Israel", had strengthened Hizballah and other extremist groups, and furthered the trend of young Tunisians relating more to the ideas of jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda than those of "non-violent and moderate" Islamist organizations such as An-Nahda (Septel).

BALLARD